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THE

PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline of life."

THE TRAINING OF GIRLS FOR PROFESSIONAL LIFE.*

By Edith A. Barnett.

When I chose this subject for my address this evening, I did so in the hope of being able to give some practical help to a considerable number of sorely perplexed parents. No one can feel more keenly than I do that in those branches of the Union's work that deal exclusively with the duties of parents, we unmarried women are—or at any rate may be—out of our proper place. But when it comes to dealing with questions of professional life, we who lead a professional life must have something to say to those women whose life has been passed in the shelter of a home, and who have never been obliged to do battle with the world. It will be impossible for me, in the time that we have to spare, to speak in detail of the special training required for each work, and I shall, at any rate to begin with, speak of work in general, and of those things that are, as it seems to me, supremely necessary to produce a good and capable worker in any field. That at least, if I can manage it, will fit all my hearers; information about special work could at the best, fit only here and there one.

* Addressed to the Hampstead and St. John's Wood Branch of the P.N.E.U., January 8th, 1894.

First, let me say that I use the word "professional" in its widest possible significance. People are not always agreed as to what are and what are not professions for men. And I imagine that no-one will be bold enough even to try to lay down hard and fast rules anent professions for women. Certainly, no-one will quarrel with me if I speak of a "professed" cook; there are those who think that women with proper ambition should seldom go outside that very necessary calling. Nor will anyone dispute the fact that the law and medicine are among the recognised professions for both sexes. Between these two extremes we can certainly find room to place my few remarks. In the second place, a professional woman, let her profession be what it may, does at least profess to be competent to do well one particular kind of work. We use the word in a third sense when we mean, as we often do, that professional persons receive payment for their work, in contra-distinction to amateurs who may do the same work, who occasionally work as well, but who are not paid.

What I am going to speak about to-night is the training of girls to do one kind of work well, so well that the world is ready to pay them money for doing it. I have in my mind as I speak the dozens of young women who have at one time or another come to me for advice respecting the career that they should follow—advice which I am bound to say, they seldom take—and the scores of young women whom I have seen at work failing, and the few young women whom I see at work succeeding; and if my remarks seem a little personal I beg you to remember that these young women are types of the rest, and that if your girls go the same way to work, the same dismal failure awaits them, only worse, because the field of women's labour gets every year more crowded. The girls are now at home and tenderly cared for; in a few years they will have to make their way uncared for in a hard world. How can we best train them for that future?

To begin with, let me insist on the fact agreed to by all sages and thinkers, that it *is* a hard world. Such as it is, so we find it and shall leave it. In it we have our work to do, and our powers to develop. When we have done our work here and developed our souls so far as they can be developed under these present conditions, we and the children shall find other

work and other conditions awaiting us elsewhere. Meanwhile, and this is our topic for the moment, no thinker has ever said that we are in the world in order that we may have a "good time," nor even that the "good time" is to be had by striving after it. It is possible, no doubt, to give children in the nursery some sort of a "good time," if we set our best endeavours that way. But I say deliberately "some sort of a good time" because I am sure that even at this early stage of life, the essential truth of life is too much for our endeavours in the case of many children; in the case, that is, of all those children who are a little more thoughtful, who have a little more stuff in them than the average. Spoiled children are not happy children; that is a commonplace. And even if they were, those few years of childish happiness might easily be bought at too dear a rate. For how very short childhood is! Mothers who naturally find a culmination of their existence in their life as wives and mothers, often, as it seems to me, forget what a very little time this nursery life lasts. Nursery, school-life, girlhood, cannot possibly be prolonged for more than twenty-five years; and the mothers who listen to me know well how that long before twenty-five years have gone by, the old life is in many cases no longer sufficient. The old home is too narrow. The old interests pall. And long before even twenty-five years have gone over the baby's head, the baby begins to look a little old, and a little bored, and a little ill; and the perplexed mother comes to me or to some other professor of work, and says, "I think perhaps my daughter would be happier if she did something; what would you advise her to do?"

When mothers begin the conversation in that way, I always feel more than a little hopeless. Because I note that fatal word "happier," and I know that it is a most difficult thing to make a woman either happy or useful if she has been brought up to woman's estate in the faith that she ought to be made happy, and not that she ought to make herself useful to her generation. Women who set out to make themselves useful generally end by finding themselves happy, or at least as happy as it is in them to be. It isn't in all persons to be happy. A happy temper is a gift rather than a virtue. I feel hopeless, I say, when the conversation begins in this way, because from it I learn, that a false ideal

of life has been set before the girl who is submitted for my professional advice; and I know that before we shall get any very good work out of her, we must not only teach her the new things, but make her unlearn the old things—always a harder task; we must instil into her other and truer faiths about life and duty: we must begin, in fact, to build that foundation for her life's work, which ought to have been firmly laid many long years ago.

I suppose that all serious minded persons, however much they may differ on minor points, will agree to accept this fundamental statement of duty respecting work. Every man or woman is bound to give to the world at least as much as he or she takes from it; to do some sort of work, bodily, mental or spiritual, that shall be worth to the world as least as much as the food and raiment destroyed during life. And I suppose that most persons who have the habit of thinking will also hold that the majority of women have ample opportunity of justifying their existence by their work as mothers. But without wandering far afield into tempting but somewhat unprofitable subjects of discussion, we may observe that the girls who want work are not married already, and that in a great many cases it seems certain that they will not be called upon to serve their generation as wives and mothers. And so the choice for them lies between doing no work at all, and doing some other kind of work. This is the choice that, for good or for evil, lies before a large number of women. There are, so we are assured on plentiful evidence, no chances of marriage for half a million of English women; and I think it will be agreed that the greatest disparity between the sexes shews itself in the professional classes, or in those classes from which professional women come. I do not put it forth as my opinion that the choice of a profession during girlhood, nor the following of a profession during womanhood, either hinders a girl's chances, or lessens her suitability for a married life. These are matters upon which it is clearly impossible to gather evidence; I can only give an opinion; but I believe that given three sisters, one following a profession and two doing nothing, the busy sister will have as many offers of marriage as an unoccupied sister; whether she will be as likely to accept the first possible husband is another question, leading us into other regions of thought. I say so much because I wish to make it clear that I have not neglected to think out the matrimonial side of the question. I even think it possible that in some future condition of society, where the numbers of men and women are more equal, it may be wise to assume, until a woman's character and habits are fixed, that she is certain to marry. I only say that it is not wise now. First, because the one thing practically certain is that out of every family of middle-class daughters, some will not marry; second, because it is the mothers who bring up their daughters to choose between marriage and starvation, who make and who keep the social question what it is. There is a profession for women whose ranks such mothers indirectly swell.

And I say so much because many of the mothers who come to me for advice about their daughters' future, have never thought of anything else than the matrimonial side of the question. Every now and again while they are dropping out items respecting their symptoms, or waiting in a deprecatory manner for my diagnosis of the case, they say plaintively, "Of course Dorothea *may* marry, and then she would find any training useless; a girl who's going to be married wants nice clothes." Or, "My husband does not wish Sophy to take up any work that needs an expensive training, for you see with a girl one hopes she won't have to work *all* her life, though, I suppose, you will think me very feeble to say that; you strong-minded ladies think, of course, that it is a very poor thing for a woman to be happily married." Or again, "I always did think that my girls would marry, but we've lost money lately, and girls without money don't marry now; men are so mercenary, don't you think? So I think it better that one of them should go out for a time. But I tell dear Ethel, that she need not go into it as if she were condemned to work for many years. If one of the younger ones married, we should want dear Ethel home again. So, of course, a long or difficult training is not at all what *we* need. Isn't there something that girls go into where she'd soon begin a nice salary?"

Out of this mass of information I single one item. "You've lost money?" I say, enquiringly. "Then am I to understand that your girl must earn enough to live upon, or can you make her a good allowance now and leave her a

competence presently?" In answer to which I am told that there is either no allowance forthcoming, or just what the girl has the habit of spending in dress and pocket-money in a luxurious home; that for the future, when the home is broken up, there is, or there may be, if times don't get worse, "a little"; and that the one thing which it is next door to impossible to find is a sum of ready money down to pay for any training. In fact, I feel bound to say that in a large number of cases it is just this lack of ready money, this difficulty of getting twenty pounds out of papa by asking for it when he happens to be in a good humour, that has finally decided mamma and the girls that one of them shall "do something." Among idle folk, even more than among working folk, it is the pernicious custom to live one's life from hand to mouth.

Mamma, with the girl in question, is sitting before me, they are both well dressed, perhaps even handsomely dressed; they are well grown, and manifestly well fed. I ask the girl what she can do, or what she has a fancy for learning? She says she is sure she doesn't know, but she supposes she can do something. Someone told her that women could make a good living lecturing; she didn't quite understand about what, but she thought I could tell her that. Then mamma says she hopes the position is pretty good; in her young days it would have been thought a very unprotected position for a young girl to place herself in, but things are altered, and perhaps lecturing might do. I look at this "young girl," and decide that she will never see thirty again. "Will this unpractical pair never learn to face facts as they are?" I say to myself.

They look the sort of women who take more interest in clothes than in things in general, so I ask the girl if she can make dresses, if she would like to teach dressmaking? She can't make dresses; she has sometimes helped the maid to make a dress, but she never made a whole one all alone by herself; she'd surely never get to the end of a job so long as that. She can't cook; she did once make a cake with cook's help. She can't write very legibly; and I remember that the note she wrote to make this appointment was ill-expressed, imperfectly spelt, and devoid of any punctuation whatsoever. She says she left school "ever so

many (I mentally say 15) years ago, and that she's sure she couldn't teach. It does not seem to occur to her that the subjects she studied at school are not solely intended for the torture of children, and that it is at least theoretically possible that she might have pursued them after the mature scholarship of 17. She can play the piano a little, and she can carve wood somehow. She thinks she might do something with that.

Finally, mamma says again, "What do you advise her to do?" What can anyone advise? Here is a fair statement of the case: A woman of 30 comes reluctantly to the conclusion that she is not going to marry. Her father, while he is alive and in receipt of an income, does not find it easy to give her all the comforts and luxuries that she wishes for, and he tells her that at his death he can leave her little or nothing. Therefore, if she does nothing to alter the position of affairs she must look forward to a solitary life of poverty. She does not hate work only because she has never in her life tried it. She does not hate discipline only because she has no conception of it as entering into her own life. For fifteen years she has been lapped in luxury, and every morning when she got out of bed has thought only of what she would like to do until she went to bed once more. The few things that she has from time to time undertaken to do through those fifteen years, she has left off doing as soon as she was in the least tired, or as soon as they became in the least distasteful. She has had "rages" for this or that, but there is not one single thing that she can do as well as a tenth-rate professional. But she wants the position, and, above all, the pay, not of a twentieth but of a second-rate professional; she is shocked, and her mamma is quite offended when I tell her the average earnings of an indifferent handicraftswoman in the wood-carving or the piano-playing line, and the number of hours she must toil to earn even that.

"Life would be mere drudgery," they say. "Why! she couldn't live upon it." The answer to which is plain enough. Life *is* mere drudgery to workers who are unskilled and unskilful and rather idle; and what an unskilled worker earns in any profession after she is thirty with no outlay of capital and no special gifts is never more than a pittance. At no sort of unskilled labour are the years after thirty as

valuable as the years before. You can't eat your cake and have it; it does not happen, and it would not be fair if it did happen, that the world will pay as much for the fag end of your life as for the best years of your life. There's a time for everything; and the years after thirty are not the years in which we can best be trained for any new work, or in which we can accommodate ourselves most readily to new habits.

"She could not live upon it." No; verily; she could not live upon the wages of any unskilled work. The question is, could she live on the wages of any woman's labour? When one comes to think about it she has indeed been trained, most carefully, in very expensive habits! The food she eats, the wine she drinks, the clothes she wears and the maids who mend them, the house she lives in, and the servants who run at her bidding cost a good deal more than even a skilled woman worker can usually earn. £150 a year is more than they most of them have, but it would go a very little way towards keeping her in the only way of life to which she has been accustomed. She hasn't the least idea of how to lay out £150 a year, what it will buy, and what with that income she would have to go without. And if this poor woman begins to earn and to live on her earnings, she must while she is learning her new profession accustom herself to a totally new mode of life; to eat food less dainty, to wear clothes less perfect, to walk where she has ridden, to keep her money in her pocket and to break the habits of a lifetime every time she goes shopping. It is a hard trial for a woman whose habits have begun to crystallise; and I do not wish to pass over the opportunity of saying that it is a wholly gratuitous trial. Circumstances may compel parents to deprive children of luxuries, but no circumstances can compel parents to bring children up in luxuries; and I say deliberately that it is a cruelty to bring children up in luxuries that you cannot leave them reasonable means of procuring all their lives long. The changes and chances of life are manifold; no man can guard against them all. But in a large number of cases this is no matter of change nor of chance; it is a certainty that when the parents die the children will have to alter their whole mode of life. I say, again, very deliberately, meaning exactly what I say, that for the children's happiness

you should sink the money in the sea rather than buy with it expensive tastes, of which the children will never be able to strip themselves all their lives long. I myself hold, in common with most thinkers, that expensive habits are a hindrance to the spiritual life; but I am not now speaking of any higher life. I am speaking and thinking merely of a useful, commonplace life led by an average woman who has to earn a living, and I assert that numbers of women are beaten in the race because they cannot at the same time fight the world and their own appetites; because their upbringing has been such that their habits and their earnings are out of all proportion to each other.

Forgive me if I venture to put into plain words the objection that acts in many parents' minds against plain living for the girls. It is urged that girls must be dressed well and taken into society, in order that they may have chances of marrying: it is urged that if portionless girls were dressed according to their means, or lack of means, they would not be sufficiently attractive to find a husband. Whether such objections should weigh with mothers, who, at any rate, make a profession of being "true and just in all their dealings," is a question; that such objections do weigh is a fact. For my part, I have not observed that men are supremely anxious to marry a portionless girl of expensive tastes; but my experience may be eccentric! And we certainly hear and read about men being afraid to marry, and one obvious reason for such fear (if it exists) is that many girls expect to take out of the family exchequer a sum out of all proportion to that which they bring into it. It is very short-sighted and very unfair to bring up portionless girls so that they are unfit to work as a poor man's wife, and unable to find content within the limits of a single woman's earnings.

What are a single woman's earnings? I spoke just now of £150 as a likely sum. I know that that is very much above the average, even for a trained worker. I should say that £150 or even £100 is a quite impossible income for a woman of no special gifts who begins work on the wrong side of thirty. The women who earn £150 to £200 a year have spent on their training years of their life and hundreds of pounds in money. For instance, in the Girls' Public Day School Company's service a salary of over £135 is an exception,

even after years of work; and a teacher who has not taken her degree (and any degree means outlay of time and capital) can never reckon on an income of over £100. These women give highly skilled service; and though you may think the pay small, the fact remains that there are always more teachers going begging than posts. A head mistress working for the Company gets £250 and capitation fees; that may mean the bare £250 in a small school, or it may mean £600 to £700 a year. It sounds handsome, but how many of such posts are there? There are hundreds of teachers who have no more real chance of getting a head-mistress-ship than I have myself. And directly you go outside the Company's service, the tendency is for salaries to fall alarmingly. I am acquainted with a head mistress who gets £160 and no rooms; and with a second mistress who earns a long way under £100; and I expect them both to keep on with that income till they are past work and retire on their savings.

I am often surprised that more girls do not qualify as teachers in Board schools, or Church schools. The pay is not much behind that in High Schools for Girls, and the work is in many ways less arduous. The outlay is so much less, that an annuity bought with £200 or £300 should be added to the low salary in order to compare the two rates of pay with any fairness; and for good women teachers there is a great demand. The cost of living is also much less in the case of a Board School teacher.

A teacher of cookery or dressmaking, often after a cheap and wholly inadequate training, may, at the present moment, get £60 to £80 with, perhaps, some allowances; against which must be set the fact that she is never at home, and that the work is very uncertain, and that the cheap short training which attracted her has also attracted a crowd of other women, all anxious to undersell one another.

A secretary gets from 10s. a week onwards. There can be but few secretaries in London who get £100, without board, and those who do are always possessed of special knowledge gained by years of good work or by years of study.

Post-office clerks begin at £65, and go on to £100. In order to earn this they must pass an entrance examination before they are 20, and they must live in London or the suburbs. It is a very good thing to go in for; but, like other good

things, it is not open to those who wait till they are eight and twenty or thirty, hoping that something will turn up.

All these are non-resident posts. Any resident post is generally better paid. In fact, there is no women's work so well paid, considering the outlay and the number of years one can go on at it, as household service. Your housemaid to whom you pay £20 a year is better warmed and far better fed, and has much more pocket-money, and will keep her rosy cheeks much later in life, than your daughter whom you train or half train for some work that she goes out to in all weathers, coming home at night on foot to the sort of lodging that can be paid for out of her weekly wage. I think that the more one enquires into women's earnings, the more sure one becomes that a woman who earns her own living, ought to be able to keep herself on £80 a year, and she cannot keep herself on that income in health—not to speak of comfort—unless she has been taught to manage a small income from her youth up. And if she is to have any pleasure in her working life, she must learn early to enjoy those pleasures that are not costly. The facts work out something like this. Your daughter when she is left to herself will earn one year with another £70 to £90 a year, and she will have to live upon it *plus* the interest of any capital you may be able to leave her. And to earn even this, you must pay money out now to have her trained in the business that she means to follow. For untrained work there is no demand and no salary.

My address is on the training of girls, so far I have spoken of how not to do it. In preparing any young person for any profession we have to discriminate between the general training which has for its end the formation of character and of habit; and the special training which aims at imparting some knowledge or giving some dexterity required by the professors of some special work. For the general training we look to the parents themselves, and we need not wait to begin nor even to complete it, until we have decided what a girl is going to do or to be. For the special training we must wait awhile, and the special training is generally given, not by the parents but by some person paid by the parents to do that special kind of work. Parents often tell me that they cannot begin to train their girls for work until they know whether they will have to work or not. I wish I could make

them see that every woman is bound to do good work of some kind, whether she is paid money for doing it or not. The general training of character and habit does not unfit a woman for the life of a wealthy wife, and if she never becomes either a wife or wealthy she will not find herself handicapped by it. It is not the possession of capital, nor of talent, nor of special training, nor even of good health, good looks and good manners, that determines success in a woman's career; it is a strong character. You can develop that in a child though you haven't a penny in your pocket, and it will be worth untold pennies to her, even from the low standpoint of £ s. d.

Train the savage out of her; teach her to deny herself to-day for the sake of better things to come to-morrow.

Train the animal out of her; teach her to do her tale of work first, and to think of the gratification of her appetites after. Teach her that the reward of good work is to know that the work is well done; don't reward her good work while she is a child by something to eat or something to wear.

Train her to be strong in well-doing; don't try to make her soft for your own indolence and love of soft things. Suppose I were to say of your son, "Oh! such a nice looking boy, with a pretty smile and pretty hair. So gentle and soft you can't think!" Would you be pleased? Or if it were somebody else's boy, would you augur well of that boy's career if he were launched penniless in the world? But you say yourself of your daughter when you bring her to me for advice, "Everyone thinks she's pretty; not good features, but she looks pretty when she smiles, and she has pretty hair. So gentle and soft, you can't think; I feel sure she'll get on."

Train her to say a good round "no" when she is face to face with wrong-doing in and out of herself.

Train her to be diligent. Don't let her loaf for amusement. Get her into the rare habit of using all her time and wasting none. Make her do some kind of work and do it well and systematically.

Train her to be punctual; not merely punctual by the clock, but punctual in carrying out when the moment comes, plans that have been judged to be wise. Teach

her to do what has to be done at the moment when it is due, and never accept or give "I don't like it," as a reason for leaving a duty unfulfilled, nor "I do like it" as a reason for doing an unwise thing.

Train her to be persistent and not to be turned aside by the first difficulty in her path. Do not let her take up any employment lightly, but once taken up, cast no employment lightly away.

Train her to respect work and workers. You will not do this by giving out feeble truisms about the value of work *now*, when the tardy moment has come for your daughter to cease her life of idleness. If all her life long she has heard you pitying the working woman as "poor thing;" if you have treated your children's governess as of inferior station to the children themselves; if since the child can remember she has seen that you invite those women of your acquaintance who work, because they work, to your second best parties, or maybe not even to any party; it is idle to expect that your daughter will feel any proper pride in her work until she has been out in the world long enough to unlearn the lessons you have taught her.

Inspire her with a determination to know. The love of knowledge for its own sake brings great and pure pleasure; it is a pleasure of which no change of circumstance, no advance of age can rob us. Teach your daughter that the end of school-life is the beginning of learning, and not its natural end. Teach her also that the best learning lies not inside the covers of books, and that the most valuable learning must be gathered without a teacher's aid.

(*To be continued.*)